

THE STABAT MATER



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THE

STABAT MATER SPECIOSA

AND THE

STABAT MATER DOLOROSA

TRANSLATED BY

FRANKLIN JOHNSON

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS FROM THE OLD MASTERS

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THE SISTINE MADONNA	<i>Raphael</i> .	<i>Frontispiece</i>
ECCE HOMO	<i>Guido</i> . . .	Facing 15
MADONNA DELLA SCALA	<i>Correggio</i> . . .	“ 22
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INTRODUCTION.

I.

THE HYMNS.

I HERE present to the reader, in the original Latin and in English translations preserving the measure of the Latin, the two most tender hymns of the Roman Church, the *Stabat Mater Speciosa* and the *Stabat Mater Dolorosa*, or, as they are frequently called, the *Mater Speciosa* and the *Mater Dolorosa*. They are closely related: in metrical structure they are alike, and much of the language is the same in both. But though they thus resemble each other in external features, they differ in spirit and aim. The first is a pæan, the second a dirge; the first is adapted to Christmas, the second to Good Friday; the first contemplates the cradle of Christ, the second His cross; the first rejoices in the birth of the Divine Babe, though its happiness is dashed with tears as it looks from the glad beginning to the tragical end, from Bethlehem to Calvary, from the manger to the tomb, while the second exhibits throughout a heart broken by the anguish of Mary and her Son.

Did either of these sacred poems stand alone, it would be regarded as an original work of the highest beauty and pathos; but a comparison of the two renders it evident that one was derived from the other. Dr. John Mason Neale, the eminent translator of Latin hymns, assigned the priority to the *Mater Speciosa*; but Dr. Philip Schaff, with more reason, expresses the contrary opinion, and observes that the *Mater Dolorosa* was suggested by the prophecy of Simeon in Luke 2 : 35, and the incident related in John 19 : 25, "Now there stood by the cross of Jesus his mother." If the *Mater Dolorosa* were the offspring of the *Mater Speciosa*, it would probably not have struck its roots into these minute details of sacred history. But granting that the *Mater Dolorosa* is the earlier, it is easy to see how the *Mater Speciosa* grew out of it.

II.

THE FAME OF THE MATER DOLOROSA.

THE Stabat Mater Dolorosa is much better known than its companion hymn, owing perhaps to its theme; since the death of Christ possesses an interest for the disciple which even His birth cannot match. It has long been sung in the Roman churches on the Friday in Passion Week, and on the third Sunday in September. In many places its separate stanzas are interposed between the divisions of the Stations of the Cross. In the Sistine Chapel it is used as an offertory on the Thursday of Holy Week. It has inspired the genius of the greatest musicians. Pergolesi composed his Stabat Mater on his death-bed, and produced a work justly celebrated for the depth and sincerity of its pathos. There are two Stabat Maters by Palestrina, "either of which," it has been said, "would suffice to immortalize him." One of these is employed in the Sistine Chapel. The Stabat Mater of Hayden is "a treasury of refined and graceful melody." That of Rossini is more artificial,

shallow, and worldly: it has been compared to “a Mater Dolorosa painted, standing under the cross, and clad in a Parisian court-dress.” The translations of the Mater Dolorosa are numerous in all the languages of Christendom which possess a literature.

III.

THE GROWING FAME OF THE MATER SPECIOSA.

THE *Mater Speciosa*, on the other hand, has been known to the world but a short time, although it comes to us from the same antiquity to which we are indebted for its sorrowful associate. Like the *Mater Dolorosa*, it was published in 1495; but it attracted little attention till 1852, when Ozanam brought it out in his work on the Franciscan Poets. So far as I am aware, it is not used in the Roman churches; it has never been made the subject of an elaborate musical composition; and few translations of it exist.

IV.

THE AUTHOR.

THE Mater Dolorosa has been attributed to several different authors. The most recent and careful studies render it probable, though not certain, that we are indebted to Giacomo da Todi for this exquisite hymn. He was born in the twelfth century, at Todi, Umbria, Italy, of the noble family of the Benedetti. His name sometimes appears in the Latin form of Jacobus de Benedictis. He became eminent in Rome as a lawyer and judge, and enriched himself. He lived carelessly during his earlier years of professional success; but the death of his wife, who was killed by the falling of a crowded scaffold at a public spectacle, changed the whole direction of his career, and he abandoned secular concerns and entered the Franciscan order of monks. This society was then at the height of its primitive enthusiasm, but the new member surpassed his fellows in ardor, and at times became insane with exaggerated fervor. He inflicted upon himself severe tortures. On one occasion he entered the public market-place naked, on hands

and feet, with a saddle on his back and a bridle in his mouth; and on another he went to the wedding of his niece covered only with feathers of various colors, in which he had rolled after anointing his body with oil. By such actions did he express his contempt for the world and its usages, and earn the derisive appellation of *Giacopone*, or *Jacob the Great*. But these things, related by *Wadding*, himself a *Franciscan*, and the historian of his order, should not lead us to doubt the sincerity and piety of the zealot: we must consider that his age differed from ours. One extreme begets another; and the prevalent corruptions of society produced their opposite in an asceticism which at times passed into frenzy. *Giacomo* was severe in his criticisms not only of the world, but also of the Church, and, having offended *Boniface VIII.*, that Pope imprisoned him. He was liberated on the death of the pontiff, and closed his life not long afterwards, in 1306, an aged man. "He died," says *Wadding*. "like a swan, having composed several hymns just before." His book of *Spiritual Songs*, though written in the formative period of the Italian language, and hence presenting a mixture of barbarous dialects, has given him a permanent place among the poets of his nation.

The *Mater Speciosa* has also been attributed to *Giacomo*, and, together with the *Mater Dolorosa*, was published in the

Latin appendix to his Italian poems, at Brescia, in 1495. Its close resemblance to the *Mater Dolorosa* constitutes strong evidence of a common authorship for both. The fervor of the hymn, and specially of the tenth stanza, which almost borders upon madness, agrees well with the character of the monk. This conclusion has been opposed on the ground that a writer would hardly wish to produce such an imitation of his own work. Were the *Mater Speciosa* in any proper sense a parody of the *Mater Dolorosa*, the objection would possess weight; but it loses its force when we consider that the *Mater Speciosa* is almost the equal of the *Mater Dolorosa* in propriety of thought, in tenderness and reverence of sentiment, and in grace of expression.

V.

THE PORTRAITURES OF MARY.

THE fine genius of the author is shown in his two portraits of the mother of Jesus, which, though near akin, are yet distinct. In the *Mater Speciosa* her features are those of a maiden, youthful, fair, active, pure, and full of changing emotions. In the *Mater Dolorosa*, however, her appearance is matronly; we perceive that she has acquired weight of character with the lapse of years; and she weeps with such quiet dignity of sorrow that she impresses us as a large and stately figure. In neither poem is there any attempt to describe her, yet the pictures of the Mary but just emerged from girlhood, in the first bliss of maternity, conscious that she has brought the Son of God into the world, and of the Mary past mid-life, wise with much experience, steadfast and strong of soul, and suffering in unfathomed grief, are as definite as they could be made. The translator must not confuse these delineations.

Nearly all the words used in the *Mater Dolorosa* to express the grief of Mary, like “*contristo*,” “*doleo*,” “*afflictus*,” “*tris-*

tis," and "supplicium," refer must naturally only to the emotions of the heart. A few, such as "maereo," have well-marked primary and secondary meanings, the primary pointing to the inward anguish, and the secondary to its outward expression. I am convinced by the general cast of the hymn that these are used in their primary signification. The principal words relating to the action of Mary are those which represent her as trembling, as shedding tears, and as weeping. Only once is she said to wail, and that is near the close of the poem, after her Son has yielded up His spirit, when the custom of the East would require such lamentation. The picture as a whole is one of sorrow too deep for obtrusive manifestation: the sword has pierced the soul of the mother, but she endures in silence, and her agony acquires majesty from her quietude. The translator, therefore, must beware not to represent her as sighing, as moaning, as groaning, throughout the scene.



VI.

THE LATIN TEXT.

As usually printed, the *Mater Speciosa* has twelve stanzas, and the *Mater Dolorosa* ten. I here place the two hymns beside each other, that the reader may see at a glance the intimate relation between them.

MATER SPECIOSA.

1. Stabat mater speciosa
Juxta foenum gaudiosa,
Dum jacebat parvulus;
Cujus animam gaudentem,
Lactabundam ac ferventem,
Pertransivit jubilus.

2. O quam læta et beata
Fuit illa immaculata
Mater Unigeniti!
Quæ gaudebat et ridebat
Exultabat, cum videbat
Nati partum inclyti!

MATER DOLOROSA.

1. Stabat mater dolorosa
Juxta crucem lacrymosa,
Dum pendebat Filius;
Cujus animam gementem,
Contristatam ac dolentem,
Pertransivit gladius.

2. O quam tristis et afflicta
Fuit illa benedicta
Mater Unigeniti!
Quæ mœrebat et dolebat
Et tremebat, cum videbat
Nati pœnas inclyti!

- | | |
|---|---|
| 3. Quis jam est, qui non gauderet,
Christi matrem si videret
In tanto solatio?
Quis non posset collætari,
Christi matrem contemplari
Ludentem cum filio? | 3. Quis est homo, qui non fleret,
Matrem Christi si videret
In tanto supplicio?
Quis non posset contristari,
Piam matrem contemplari
Dolentem cum Filio? |
| 4. Pro peccatis suæ gentis,
Christum vidit cum jumentis
Et algori subditum;
Vidit suum dulcem natum
Vagientem, adoratum,
Vili diversorio. | 4. Pro peccatis suæ gentis,
Vidit Jesum in tormentis
Et flagellis subditum;
Vidit suum dulcem natum
Morientem, desolatum,
Dum emisit spiritum. |
| 5. Nato Christo in præsepe,
Cœli cives canunt læte
Cum immenso gaudio;
Stabat senex cum puella
Non cum verbo nec loquela
Stupescences cordibus. | |
| 6. Eja mater, fons amoris,
Me sentire vim ardoris,
Fac ut tecum sentiam!
Fac ut ardeat cor meum
In amatum Christum Deum,
Ut sibi complaceam. | 5. Eja mater, fons amoris,
Me sentire vim doloris,
Fac ut tecum lugeam!
Fac ut ardeat cor meum
In amando Christum Deum,
Ut sibi complaceam. |
| 7. Sancta mater, istud agas,
Prone introducas plagas
Cordi fixas valide. | 6. Sancta mater, istud agas,
Crucifixi fige plagas
Cordi meo valide. |

Tui nati cœlo lapsi,
Jan dignati fœno nasci,
Pœnas mecum divide.

Tui nati vulnerati,
Tam dignati pro me pati,
Pœnas mecum divide.

8. Fac me vere congaudere,
Jesulino cohærere,
Donec ego vixero.
In me sistat ardor tui;
Puerino fac me frui
Dum sum in exilio.

7. Fac me vere tecum flere,
Crucifixo condolere,
Donec ego vixero.
Juxta crucem tecum stare,
Meque tibi sociare,
In planctu desidero.

9. Virgo virginum præclara,
Mihi jan non sis amara;
Fac me parvum rapere;
Fac ut pulchrum infantem portem
Qui nascendo vicit mortem,
Volens vitam tradere.

8. Virgo virginum præclara,
Mihi tam non sis amara;
Fac me tecum plangere;
Fac ut portem Christi mortem,
Passionis fac consortem,
Et plagas recolere.

10. Fac me tecum satiari,
Nato me inebriari,
Stans inter tripudio.
Inflammatum et accensum,
Obstrupescit omnis sensus,
Tali de commercio.

9. Fac me plagis vulnerari,
Cruce hac inebriari
Ob amorem Filii.
Inflammatum et accensum,
Per te, Virgo, sum defensum
In die Judicii.

11. Omnes stabulum amantes,
Et pastores vigilantes
Pernoctantes sociant.
Per virtutem nati tui
Ora ut electi sui
Ad patriam veniant.

12. Fac me nato custodiri,
Verbo Dei præmuniri,
Conservari gratia;
Quando corpus morietur,
Fac ut animæ donetur
Tui nati gloria.

10. Fac me cruce custodiri,
Morte Christi præmuniri,
Confoveri gratia.
Quando corpus morietur,
Fac ut animæ donetur
Paradisi gloria.

VII.

THESE TRANSLATIONS.

IN my translations I have sought to reproduce the meaning and emotion of the Latin in acceptable verse. The compiler of "The Seven Great Hymns of the Mediæval Church" says in a private letter to me: "A translator might well make three translations of a poem; one to portray its structure, that is, its measure, melody, movement, and rhyme; one to present in detail its ideas; and one to produce an impression as similar as possible to that of the original on the mind of the reader. In publishing, he should reverse the order, and put the last first." My work is designed to be of the third kind; but I have not forgotten the requirements of the first and second. If I have produced versions in easy and natural English, I have fulfilled one of my purposes; but if my work bears on its face the evidence of its derivation from another language, in strained and unusual words and constructions, I have failed.

The ninth stanza of the *Mater Speciosa* begins with a petition that the Virgin be not bitter towards her suppliant, a fit preface to the lines immediately following, in which he rises to such audacity of fervor as might be considered irreverent, proposing to take her infant from her arms and bear it in his own. The corresponding stanza of the *Mater Dolorosa* opens with the same deprecation of displeasure; but the prayer thus introduced presents no special ground of fear, as it is not at all more daring than much that precedes it. Those who hold that the *Mater Speciosa* is the original hymn, and that the *Mater Dolorosa* is its later offspring, might find in this fact a strong, though far from conclusive argument. As my aim is to produce versions that shall read as nearly as possible like hymns written at first in our own language, with the connections and transitions of thought and emotion clearly marked, I have ventured upon a slight departure from the Latin at this point of the *Mater Dolorosa*.

In order to make a translation of any poem that shall be literal as to the meaning and feeling of the author, it is necessary occasionally to use language at a certain remove from that of the text. Some translators of verse seek to keep the exact phraseology of the original, even at the cost of the thought, the emotion, and the elevation of style which are necessary to

poetry. The result is a dead imitation, rather than a living reproduction. The late Dr. John M. Neale, though his translations are in general very free, has pursued this course in his version of the *Mater Speciosa*, and his fifth stanza is an instructive example of the necessary issue of such labors :

Jesus lying in the manger,
 Heavenly armies sang the stranger,
 In the great joy-bearing part;
 Stood the old man with the maiden,
 No word speaking, only laden
 With this wonder in their heart.

Here the third line,

 In the great joy-bearing part,

conveys no sense whatever. The fourth,

 Stood the old man with the maiden,

though quite exact, presents a certain perplexity to the ordinary Protestant reader, unfamiliar as he is with ecclesiastical legend and Roman dogmatics. Only after some study will he remember that ecclesiastical legend makes Joseph an old man at his marriage, and that Roman dogmatics asserts the perpetual virginity of Mary, and conclude that these are the persons referred to. I have thought it better to translate in such a way as also to interpret.

Both the *Mater Speciosa* and the *Mater Dolorosa* are disfigured by the gross Mariolatry of the Roman Church, and on this account are unfit for the devotional use of Christians not connected with that sect. I have added adaptations of the hymns in which this objectionable feature will not be found. The modification extends to but a few phrases, and does not affect in the least the general sentiment of even a single line, since the worship addressed to the mother is simply transferred to the Son, before whom angels bow.

The various published translations of the *Mater Dolorosa*, which I have studied carefully, have influenced mine to a certain extent. I am more indebted, however, to a manuscript version by the Rev. W. S. McKenzie, D.D., of Boston. It is faithful to the Latin in an eminent degree, and, in addition, possesses the merit of a smooth and graceful style.



THE MATER SPECIOSA.

STOOD the mother in her beauty,
Rapt with thoughts of love and duty,
 Near the stall where lay her child;
And her soul, forgetting sadness,
Glowed with light of new-born gladness,
 Filled and thrilled with transport mild.

Of all women has none other
Joyed like her, the sinless mother
 Of God's sole begotten Son,
As with laughter and elation
She beheld the incarnation
 Of the High and Holy One.

Who his heart's delight could smother,
And regard unmoved Christ's mother
 Playing with her baby boy?

Who could all her peerless treasure
Of celestial solace measure,
Void of sympathetic joy?

Then, again, she saw with sighing
Christ for our offences lying
Cold among the beasts of earth,
Worshipped, yet to man a stranger,
Weeping in that meanest manger
Where she laid Him at His birth.

On that babe thus cradled lowly
Gazed all heavenly spirits holy,
Singing loud His worthy praise,
While, with rapture overladen,
Joseph and the mother-maiden
Could not speak for sweet amaze.

Mother, fount of love's devotion,
Let me feel thy deep emotion,
Let me with thy passion glow,
Let me thine affection borrow
For thy Son in joy and sorrow,
That His blessing I may know.

Holy maid, the benediction
Of His birth to sore affliction
 Print upon mine inmost heart;
With thy Son, from Heaven descended
To the manger, poor, unfriended,
 May I ever have a part.

Grant as well thy joy o'erflowing,
While I cleave to Christ with growing
 Ardor till my life is spent;
With thy fervor stir and cheer me;
Let thy little child be near me
 Through this world of banishment.

Virgin, virgins all excelling,
Pardon words from love outwelling:
 I would seize thy babe from thee,
And would bear, O sweet abduction!
Him whose birth was death's destruction,
 Him whose death brought life to me.

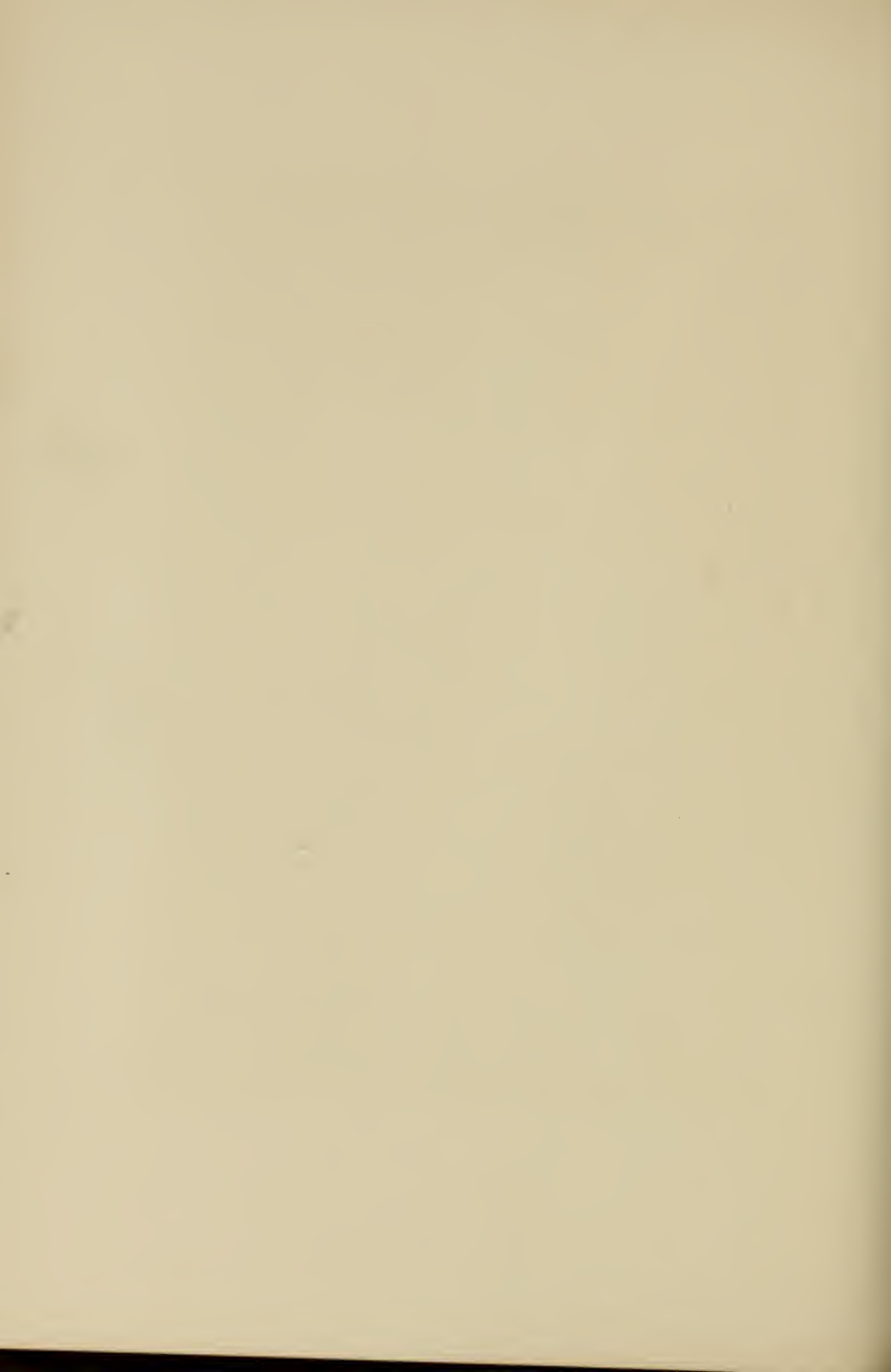
O for Christ to satiation,
Pure and high intoxication!
 O to dance with joy divine!

O for fire my soul possessing
And my flesh and sense repressing,
 Since such fellowship is mine !

Ye who love this lowly stable,
With the shepherds through the sable
 Night keep watch, a sleepless band.
Mother, by thy Son's dear merit
Pray that His elect inherit
 Of His grace their fatherland.

Let thy Son His blessing send me ;
Let that Word of God defend me ;
 Keep me in thy tender love ;
When this mortal flesh shall perish,
Evermore my spirit cherish
 In thy Paradise above.





THE MATER SPECIOSA.

ADAPTED TO THE DEVOTIONAL USE OF PROTESTANTS.

STOOD the mother in her beauty,
Rapt with thoughts of love and duty,
Near the stall where lay her child;
And her soul, forgetting sadness,
Glowed with light of new-born gladness,
Filled and thrilled with transport mild.

Of all women has none other
Joyed like her, the blessed mother
Of God's sole begotten Son,
As with laughter and elation
She beheld the incarnation
Of the High and Holy One.

Who his heart's delight could smother,
And regard unmoved Christ's mother
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Who could all her peerless treasure
Of celestial solace measure,
Void of sympathetic joy?

Then, again, she saw with sighing
Christ for our offences lying
Cold among the beasts of earth,
Worshipped, yet to man a stranger,
Weeping in that meanest manger
Where she laid Him at His birth.

On that babe thus cradled lowly
Gazed all heavenly spirits holy,
Singing loud His worthy praise,
While, with rapture overladen,
Joseph and the mother-maiden
Could not speak for sweet amaze.

Mother, home of love's devotion,
I would feel thy deep emotion,
I would with thy passion glow,
I would thine affection borrow
For thy Son in joy and sorrow,
That His blessing I may know.

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Of His birth to sore affliction

I would fill mine inmost heart;
With thy Son, from Heaven descended
To the manger, poor, unfriended,
I would ever have a part.

Teach as well thy joy o'erflowing,
While I cleave to Christ with growing
Ardor till my life is spent;
May thy fervor stir and cheer me;
May thy little child be near me
Through this world of banishment.

Virgin, virgins all excelling,
Pardon words from love outwelling:
I would seize thy babe from thee,
And would bear, O sweet abduction!
Him whose birth was death's destruction,
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O for fire my soul possessing
And my flesh and sense repressing,
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Ye who love this lowly stable,
With the shepherds through the sable
 Night keep watch, a sleepless band.
Jesus, by Thy priceless merit,
Grant that Thine elect inherit
 Of Thy grace their fatherland.

Through Thy cross Thy blessing send me ;
Holy Word of God, defend me ;
 Keep me in Thy tender love ;
When this mortal flesh shall perish,
Evermore my spirit cherish
 In Thy Paradise above.



THE MATER DOLOROSA.

STOOD the mournful mother weeping,
Near the cross her vigil keeping,

Where He hung, her Son adored :
Through her soul, of hope forsaken,
And of mighty sorrows shaken,
Pierced the sharp relentless sword.

Of all women has none other
Suffered like the blessed mother

Of God's sole begotten Son,
Who with fervent love unfailing
And with anguish unavailing
Gazed upon that dying One.

Who is hard, yet being human,
That bereaved and weeping woman
To behold with tearless eyes?

Who, his bosom sternly steeling,
Would not feel with all her feeling
Of her Son's keen agonies?

Long she saw that loved One languish
For His people's sins in anguish,
Saw His meekness 'neath the rod,
Saw her Son, of all deserted—
Earth and Heaven from Him averted—
Yield His spirit up to God.

Mother, fount of love's devotion,
I, beholding thine emotion,
Would thy burden with thee bear;
Let me thine affection borrow
For thy Son in all His sorrow,
That thy mourning I may share.

Holy mother, with affliction
Of His saving crucifixion
Fill and thrill mine inmost heart;
With thy Son, His wounds receiving
That have caused thy soul its grieving,
May I ever have a part.

I would weep with all thy weeping,
Vigil with thy vigil keeping,
 Till my mortal life shall fail;
Near the cross and near beside thee,
Where these agonies betide thee,
 I would stand and with thee wail.

Virgin, virgins all excelling,
For thy love and grief a dwelling
 Pure and holy make in me;
Let me bear Christ's crucifying;
Let me know the pains of dying
 That He suffered on the tree.

Let my heart with His be riven;
Let His cup to me be given;
 Let me of its depths partake;
And, still flaming thus with fervor,
Let me find thee my preserver
 When the Judgment Day shall break.

Through the cross thy blessing send me;
Let Christ's death from sin defend me;
 Care for me in tender love;

When this mortal flesh shall perish,
Let thy Son my spirit cherish
In His Paradise above.



THE MATER DOLOROSA

ADAPTED TO THE DEVOTIONAL USE OF PROTESTANTS.

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Near the cross her vigil keeping,
 Where He hung, her Son adored:
Through her soul, of hope forsaken,
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I would weep with all thy weeping,

Vigil with thy vigil keeping,

Till my mortal life shall fail;

Near the cross and near beside thee,

Where these agonies betide thee,

I would stand and with thee wail.

Jesus, all our thoughts excelling,

For Thy love and grief a dwelling

Pure and holy make in me;

Let me know Thy crucifying;

Let me feel the pains of dying

Thou didst suffer on the tree.

Let my heart with Thine be riven;

Let Thy cup to me be given;

Let me of its depths partake;

And, still flaming thus with fervor,

Let me find Thee my Preserver

When the Judgment Day shall break.

Through Thy cross Thy blessings send me;

Let Thy death from sin defend me;

Care for me in tender love;

When this mortal flesh shall perish,
Evermore my spirit cherish
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